

REBEL DESTINY

776
609 "The gods are friendly to you, Massa. The men have all noticed it. You look upon trees and falls with pleasure. When you see them, it is as if you met with a friend. That is good. But the gods have their powers, and men have theirs. The Rabbit says, 'Evil is everywhere.' Last night, you remember, there was a man who did not look up when you passed his house, and when you spoke 'Howdo' to him, he would not answer. He was an obia man. He would not take the hand of a white man. I have heard the men say there are others who are not glad that the white man has come so far, and that the gods have allowed it. . . ."

Abruptly he stopped. He had said more than he intended.

"I came to tell you about another thing," he continued after a moment of embarrassment. "You should know about fio-fio."

[753] Fio-fio was a small brown bug, and it was also a spirit. The spirit fio-fio brought sickness and death to human beings. For people like ourselves, untutored in the ways of the spirits, and the things which allowed them to gain sway over an individual, only a diviner could seek out the incident which had caused fio-fio to come.

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783 That was why it was necessary to bathe in a protecting fluid, to "wash fio-fio," even though we had not yet been stricken.

"Let me tell you how to wash fio-fio," he went on. "You must bathe when nobody sees you, and this is what you must have: the skin of a plantain we call the mother plantain that has been dried in smoke, and weeds which I will give you, and Negro-country pepper which I have with me, and seven pieces of chalk, and some eggshells. Some people put washing-blue in the water, too, but that you don't need. You can bathe in it early in the morning, or at noon, or right after sundown, but no one must see you."

He paused for a moment.

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578 "Do you not have fio-fio in your country? Look, this is how it is. You quarrel with a man who works for you, and he comes back and says he is sorry, and you say you are

A NIGHT AT S'EI

sorry, too. He does that because he is afraid of fio-fio. If a man quarrels with you, and he keeps his anger in him, and you keep yours, and later he takes work from you, then either he, or you, or both of you will get sick. If the anger was great, then you or he or both of you will become very sick. If you catch it soon, then you get together, and, as we say, 'Pa' *mofo*'—take back what you had said. Then you get better." 776
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Fio-fio had nothing to do with enmity. Honest enmity was not harmful. Enmity masked, however, or bitterness, or a grudge which a man harbored while he continued a relationship of friendship, sickened a man, and it sickened the man against whom the grudge was held, as well. That was fio-fio. Only those who had relationships of intimacy were subject to it—people who were united by blood ties, or ties of friendship, or servants who formed part of the household.

The remedy was ceremonially to retract and ask for pardon. It had to be done before people, with the proper ritual and bathing. [783]

"If this isn't done, then a person gets worse and worse, and dies. I myself saw the fio-fio bug fly out of the nose of a dying woman."

This woman had sickened because she had quarreled with her sister over a man. In the end they had both lost him. As time went on, they began to talk again and later lived together in their mother's house. But they had never forgiven each other. One day one of them borrowed a kerchief from the other to wear at a dance. The next day she was ill. From then on she got worse and worse.

"The quarrel between the sisters had happened so long ago that they never thought of it. So they did nothing. In a month she died, and I myself saw the fio-fio bug fly out of her nose."

He knew another story about fio-fio.

"This happened to a man I know. His child died less than a month ago. He was living with a woman, and the woman became big with child. He had been away in the

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796 bush for some months, and when he came back he did not
 626 feel well, and they quarreled often. When they quarreled she
 518 refused to cook for him, and so he said bad things to her.
 [179] He began to say the child was not his. Now when a father
 takes away his 'kra, his soul, from the child while it is in
 the mother's womb, it is not good. When the child was
 born, it was a very small child. Afterwards the man left
 the woman. He still said the child was not his, but he used
 to bring money to the woman sometimes to buy things for
 the child. The neighbors said she must not take the money.
 If she took it, they said, the child would die of fio-fio. But
 the woman took the money. Nowadays many of them don't
 believe in the old things, until they find out. When the
 child was four months old it died. Everybody knew it was
 fio-fio."

He told other incidents of what happened to people who
 had fio-fio.

"I tell you all this because sometimes the men in the
 boats talk about the whites, and they think you don't
 understand. But you know what they say, and you are
 angry. If you give them a present of leaf tobacco later, or
 rum, then they or you may become sick. . . . The men in
 the bush know what to do about fio-fio, Massa, and you
 [538] must learn, too. The proverb says: 'How is a boat to go,
 if it has no paddles?'"

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137 At the entrance to the village of S'ei a gigantic silk-
 cotton tree stood. Its trunk was massive, and the roots
 which projected outwards like so many buttresses made
 of it a great somber cathedral. The curiously twisted
 824 grooves which these buttresses made were said to house
 776 many spirits, and particularly the three who lived in the
 kankan tree, as the natives called it. Gedeonsu, the male
 god, and Tinné, his wife, lived there with their child
 Dyombie, the most dreaded of them all. The kankan tree
 gods were thought of as women's gods, though a few men
 might be found, here and there, who would, on occasion,

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532 fascinated. It showed, in its purest form, the retention of the African mask-like head. Sometimes on the prow of a boat we would see in cruder form the outlines of a mask, and once an old woman came with a food stirrer to us. Its handle ended in a knob which with a few strokes of the knife had been formed into a double representation of the human head, a perfect parallel to the type of mask that is associated with the people of the Ivory Coast.

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532 Aside from the decorated apinti drum, only some of the workaday art forms of Africa—combs, paddles, mortars, among other such objects—were retained. For their decoration the designs that in Africa had been cut into the base of figures or about the borders of masks had been remembered and reinterpreted in terms of the ancestral cults. And from those memories the Bush Negroes had developed the unique art which is theirs.

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532 Thus, in the main, the art was symbolic, and many of the designs represented the urge for reproduction. Some stemmed from the fertility cult, though not entirely of it. There was, for example, the double-bladed food stirrer, which was given by a man to his wife with a curse woven into its curves for the woman if she committed adultery.

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• [626] There were carvings that did not deal with sex at all.

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On the lower river we sat on the shore as a canoe came up. Prow and stern were carved. On one of the seats was a representation of the head of a feline, done with the utmost realism.

"You have *tigri*?" we asked the man, as we bargained for the seats.

"I will sell you this, but do not ask me what it means."

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The bird-headed paddles were also examples of this kind. When laid on their sides, they showed the form of the parrot, or whatever bird they represented—the exaggerated beak, the head, the neck, the wings, and the feet. The design called *Alukutu folo*, an emblem of those who could see into the future, was engraved on many benches on the upper river in particular, and these carvings were parted with only with the greatest reluctance, lest we try

[791]

BAYO, THE PLAYBOY

was called, and the couple were left alone, while outside 585
the villagers danced and sang of fertility all night.

In the morning the man's brothers come to the house to 831
find out if she had ever before been to the hammock with 585
another man. 626

"What happens if they find that she has?"

Bayo's reply was prompt. "Usually nothing. The man
doesn't give her as many presents as he would have given
her. If he had promised her thirty pangi, he would only give
her fourteen. If he liked her, he wouldn't turn her away."

"What would happen to her, though? Would they
punish her?"

"They say, Bak'a, sometimes a man likes her better for
it. It shows him other men had cared for her. But her
family scolds her, and sometimes punishes her, too, and
the women of the village talk plenty. They pull their lip
at her the next morning, and later, whenever there is a
quarrel, they talk about it again."

But if the girl were found to have been a virgin, then all
the people danced, and there was a great feast, with dances
to all the gods.

"You must come back for my wedding, Bak'a, you and 585
your woman. Then you will see dancing!"

"But your girl is still a child, Bayo."

"Ah, no. She is getting her cuts on her thighs. She 881
wears a cloth." He knew, because on his way down from the
Granman he had stopped at her village and when the
family was not about he had made sure. "If you come
next year, we will both be ready."

The two men still followed the bush trail when Bayo 000
had finished his account of how the marriage was con-
ducted. Now and then Tross would appear, wag his tail,
and be off into the underbrush again.

"Tell me, Bayo," the white man began, "do many girls 836
go with a man to the hammock before they are married?"

He waited for a moment before he answered. Smiling,
he ran his hand over his newly braided head with the
innumerable little braids between the lines of white.

"About half of them, I guess," he said.

/34 cont./

577 all, toward one another as fellow tribesmen they are very honest and trust one another's word. Frequently it happens that among them one family leaves the camp to go on a journey or else is absent for some other reason, and that it must leave behind unfenced the cultivated land planted with rice, tubers, bananas, bakoven, and sugar cane. But never will another of them steal any of that. And similarly their dwellings are open, since the entrance is not closed off by any door; upon their departure they leave one thing and another in it, but they will never miss anything upon their return. Certainly contributing to this is the circumstance that in the vicinity of everybody's property there is a sign or idolatrous image, which they call obia, to which great power is ascribed, and for those who might want to commit dishonest acts, the legend can be observed, as for the European:

784 "Beware of mantraps." The fear that they have of these obias is not unjustified, for if it should happen at any time that misuse of trust took place, then the culprit, however long it takes, upon discovery will not escape the revenge of the deceived, revenge which frequently consists in the administering of secret remedies whereby terrible diseases and sufferings, if not death, come about.

152 They are very concerned about the faithfulness of their
837 wife or wives, /35/ for the Bush Negro is very jealous, whereas the wives cannot be exonerated of being susceptible to seduction. Accordingly it happens among them more than once that marital fidelity is violated.

184 Of the various tribes, the Aucaners are the most
[177] civilized, but over against that also the craftiest, which can be
[157] attributed to their more frequent intercourse with Europeans.
[161] Among their tribes they are the most powerful, and their numerical strength is estimated at 4,000 to 5,000 souls.

123 According to the declaration of the Bush Negroes, no White has previously enjoyed the trust and attachment that I experienced from them. However, secretly they always conduct themselves toward the Whites, with respect to me they make an exception. If there is something secret among them that I should like to know, they will, upon my request, immediately and without any diffidence communicate it to me.

6: Hurault--85 K-5 (1948-1958) 1961 SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Boni

173 /61/
1937

Mission to determine the trijunction point of the frontiers of French Guiana-Brazil-Surinam.

1939

Declaration of war.

1944-45

Not a precise point of reference. The Boni confuse the liberation of the territory with the end of the war.

1948

First I. G. N. mission.

1949

Mr. Aubert de la Rüe's mission; second I. G. N. mission.

1952

Third I. G. N. mission. /blank page/ /63/

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

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The social institutions of the Refugee Blacks diverge noticeably from those of the African peoples from whom they issued.

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They do not include age grades, men's societies, or initiation; marriage involves neither a contract between kin groups nor "dowry."

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In a general way these societies founded by rebel slaves who had retained an extreme horror of all oppression were organized so as not to have any material constraint weigh upon the individual.

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[771]

Their institutions are entirely founded on the idea of protection against suprahuman perils; the individual remains perfectly free, and he adheres /to these institutions/ only in proportion as he is conscious of these perils. The custom of the Refugee Blacks, devoid of any means of material coercion, tends to develop with: in the individual the feeling that he is constantly threatened.

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626 that he can protect himself only by submitting to the law of the
156 group. In this doubtless must be seen the deep reason for the im-
627 portance attached to death and mourning, events around which is
centered the activity of the usual societies and which entail a
veritable mobilization.

626 It would be very difficult to condense the custom of the
771 Refugee Blacks into a rigorous code. If one wished to do it, one
would have to write as Article 1: "The living will conform to the
will of the gods and the ancestors as it is expressed through the
mouths of those possessed and by the movements of the bearers of
the dead."

613 Each one of the tribes of the Refugee Blacks is formed of a
619 certain number of matrilineages.

There is no limit on the number of these lineages, and it can
be asserted that if any lineage whatever, detached from another
tribe, asks to live in the midst of the Boni, it will be welcomed.
From the first generation the children consider themselves as Boni.

In this regard one can cite the example of the Awara Bakka 3
lineage and that of the small lineage founded in Bonville by a
Djuka woman, wife of Grand Man Ochi. All her descendants con-
sider themselves Boni. /64/

829 But only the great lineages which constituted the tribe at its
643 origin are social units recognized by the grand man, and only their
heads are called to be members of the council.

128 We shall study first the interior functioning of the lineage,
then the institutions going beyond the framework of the lineages.

/73 cont. /

643 The present grand man, contrary to ~~his~~ predecessors, has
644 only one wife. She is dressed like the other women and works
586 at her clearing like everyone else. /74/ but her marriage to the
grand man imposes special obligations on her: she can not divorce
him; neither can he repudiate her.

643 The attitude of the Boni toward the grand man is a curious
829 mixture of respect and disparagement. They regard him as the
living symbol of their nation, and each one resents as if it were a
personal insult an outsider having an incorrect attitude toward him.
But their undisciplined spirit kicks up at the measures he is obliged
to take to make them respect customary law, and even the
authority of a poised and benevolent man like Grand Man Difu is
not willingly accepted. As a matter of fact, the Boni stand for
[154] the authority of the grand man as they adhere to the worship of
[195] their gods, by the feeling of an absolute and inexorable necessity;
in their minds the grand man is above all the priest of Odun; if the
grand man were not there, they would be without defense against
the wisiman, without recourse against the vengeance exercised by
the yaka of the dead of other lineages.

The political power of the grand man is entirely based on
these beliefs, and if they were to collapse, he would disappear
with them. Nobody would submit to any other law than that of
the lineage, founded upon fear of the ancestors.

692 The lanti kuutu. This is the assembly of the men, without dis-
693 tinction of age (1) or kinship; this council (lanti = law) constitutes

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1. There is no precise rule for fixing the age from which an adolescent may sit in this council. It is apparently when he has reached full physical development and earns his living by his own efforts, about 18 to 20 years. He does not have to be married.

the legal apparatus of the Boni.

75 cont. /

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[224] The Djuka had killed the tapir which had sunk. Pressed for
lit. time, he had had to leave, requesting the Asisi people to look for

[251] The next day Pototo and Amusupé found the animal floating
[262] between two waters. They hid it in the bush and had it smoke-
dried on their own behalf. They ate it with their wives (about 100
kilos of meat).

That ended up by becoming known, and a jealous man de-
nounced them to the grand man.

Called before the l'nti kuutu, they had to apologize and were
each sentenced to pay as a fine to the grand man a demijohn of
15 liters of tafia (worth about 6,000 francs) within four months.

[1735] Both of them were at a loss to pay this fine, belonging to the
category of ne'er-do-wells who have no regular activity and live
from day to day, selling some fish or game from time to time.

[613] Amusupé appealed to Captain Konduku, head of his lineage,
who agreed to pay for the tafia for him, Amusupé reimbursing him
little by little.

[613] As for Pototo, the head of his lineage refused categorically
[689] to help him because he had eaten the maipouri alone without allow-
ing his family to share it (the village people would have found it
normal to profit by the crime, but they deemed it immoral that
one of their relatives had deprived them of meat). After three and
[123] a half months, Pototo began to occupy himself seriously at a paid
job which he had the luck to find because we needed a bossman
for two weeks.

597 The Boni did nothing but laugh while telling us this story.
626 Affairs of this kind, which do not involve any suprahuman inter-
[522] vention, escape in large measure their social morality; they have
a certain feeling for what should be done, but submit to it only in
proportion as they fear a material and immediate sanction.

/153 cont. /

with repudiation in case of a second offense. The rule is to repudiate her, under pain of ridicule.

In 1951 G..., of Kotika village, was informed that his wife A..., of Asisi village, 25 years old, was deceiving him with a boy of the same age named K.... The first time he encountered K in a village he took issue with him; K... confessed without difficulty. G... delivered a strong punch which threw him to the ground, and that was all. He did not administer any punishment to his wife but immediately let her know that he was repudiating her. Some time after, K... asked to be reconciled with him. He asked his pardon and gave him a bottle of tafia (this is obligatory for reconciliation). Since, the two men have again been friends.

It also happens that the grand man levies a more or less stiff fine on the guilty man.

According to the elders, adultery was rare in former times. If a woman was tired of her husband, she divorced him openly, but she did not deceive him. Nowadays it seems to be rather frequent.

586 Divorce. The Refugee Blacks divorce each other as easily as they join together; in general it is the woman who decides to break up the union because she finds her husband too poor, too lazy, or simply because she wants to change. /154/

In the case of divorce the woman keeps all that her husband has given to her or made for her (utensils, house, boat), but of course the man keeps all his own belongings; this rupture changes nothing about the possession of property since no object was owned jointly.

581 The rule is the following: at the time of the marriage the man puts down symbolically several personal objects (fabrics, utensils) in the woman's home. As long as these objects are in her home the marriage remains in force, the wife is held to fidelity or at the very least, if there is adultery, it is regarded as such and entails the sanction related above.

/154 cont. /

580 as such and entails the sanction related above. But the wife
586 has the absolute right, even in her husband's absence, to break
the contract unilaterally by taking back to the head of her
husband's lineage the objects left with her. From this moment
on, no more can be said to her, she is no longer guilty of adultery,
and she can take another husband forthwith; in case of the first
husband's death she will not have to stand the weight of the
mourning. All that her husband has made for her: house, boat,
etc... is kept without counterpart.

No Boni leaving on a three-month trip is sure of finding
his wife again. He may very well find another man installed
in his place, officially, without his being able to say anything.
As for those who leave for a long time, this is practically a
certainty.

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[626] This is a misfortune which however they take philo-
sophically, thinking above all of the work furnished for nothing.
What concerns them most is not to be deceived clandestinely.
for the final result is the same: they are practically obliged
to repudiate the wife in such a case, for it is unworthy of a
man to forgive, and in addition they will be the laughingstock
of the population.

Several of our boatmen made the following speech to
their wives at the time of leaving for a two-months' tour: "If
you have enough of me in my absence, if you cannot wait for
me, go and take my belongings to the house of such-and-such
a brother; I shall not be angry and will not do anything to you
on my return."

581 Custom is so favorable to the women that practically
nothing guarantees the private contract made between the man
and woman at the time of marriage. Since this contract is
[586] essentially founded on a material association, the man cutting
the clearing and the woman farming it, one might believe that
the woman would be held to fulfilling her contract even in case
of the marriage's breaking up, but there is nothing of the sort.

/175 cont./

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775 For the duration of the mourning, any indiscretion of the surviving spouse will draw upon him the pitiless vengeance of the yorka; it is important for him to make himself forgotten, to have a modest and decent demeanor. The dead person might be vexed with him for having kept his health and good looks. So they try to give the surviving spouse the aspect of a miserable and unfortunate being. The dead person's relatives are particularly interested in having this discipline observed, for in the opposite case the dead person's yorka would turn back its vengeance against his own lineage. During all the mourning the whole lineage considers itself in danger. So custom requires that during all this period the widower (or widow) be placed under the authority of the dead person's lineage.

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52 In the case of concubinage, mourning is taken on by the spouse even if the relations have not been made official. People cite the example of Way (Bonville) who assumed mourning for a Djuka with whom she had begun to live before he could propose to her officially.

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[175] State of persons in mourning. A widower's state is exactly like that of a widow, which tends to show that in the eyes of the Refugee Blacks the dead, men and women, have the same level of being and the same power over the living.

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613 The surviving spouse is placed under the protection of the ancestors of the dead spouse's lineage. Without this protection assured by the prayers of the members of this lineage, he would find himself defenseless. The proof of it is that the principal sanction against him is to lift the mourning prematurely by going to the fraga tiki to tell the ancestors that one is no longer interested in him. That amounts indirectly to cursing him (see below the example of Gamba).

/179 cont. /

765 After three months, an offering is made at the fraga tiki
[769] of the dead person's lineage, setting forth how much her spouse
[778] has respected her memory and asking permission to lighten the
[613] manifestations of his sorrow. The mourning is then lightened,
but the man in mourning continues to wear a bandeau around
his head or at the very least an old beret.

765 During the first months the man in mourning has no other
461 responsibility than to hunt and fish at the order of the dead
[613] woman's lineage. He does his own cooking with the food given
to him; he cuts a clearing for his mother-in-law or another
woman of the deceased's relatives, who will farm it with him.

[431] Next, he receives the order to go and earn the money necessary
for the sizable contribution he must bring to the festival of the
lifting of mourning. During the entire duration of the mourning
he must report on his work and moves.

765 When the end of mourning approaches, he must do a job
[606] for the benefit of his mother-in-law, generally redoing the
roof of her house or building a boat for her.

These arrangements do not involve any material sanction
[626] whatever. Like the rest of the social life of the Refugee Blacks,
they rest entirely upon fear of a suprahuman sanction.

[587] After the lifting of mourning, the person in mourning may
remarry without further delay.

765 State of widows and co-wives of a widower. The state of a
768 woman in mourning is practically identical to that of a widower.
[562] She lives for the duration of mourning in her deceased husband's
house under the surveillance of his near relatives on the maternal
[613] side. The dead man's lineage lends her all the objects she
[439] needs and furnishes the imported commodities (salt, kerosene,
soap) that she uses. On the other hand, she may freely use the
produce of the clearing that her husband had cut for her, since
it is taken for granted that these products are the exclusive
property of the wife.

643 /235 cont. /

775 A few years ago a Kormotibo woman was thus confounded.
787 She had wanted to pretend possession by a yorka in order to
695 blackmail another family.

784 Grand Man Difu recently forbade the bequeathing of gods
428 and yorka exercising the kunu (1). People will wait for them
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I. Let us recall that the dead
are questioned on this subject
as for the apportionment of the
rest of their heritage.

to manifest themselves of their own accord. That will reduce
the risks of pretense.

643 The grand man's lineage does not exercise any kunu upon
613 another lineage, and no kunu is exercised upon it. For the Boni
775 this is a fundamental idea, because the grand man is precisely
784 the supreme recourse in case of persistent calamities attributed
to the yorka of a dead person. The grand man has the power
to exorcise all the dead Boni. If his lineage exercised a kunu
or were victim of one, he would be judge and litigant at the
same time.

When, with the death of Grand Man Difu, the Dikan
lineage is extinct, and when the function passes to another
lineage, consideration of the kunu exercised by the lineages
upon one another will be determinative in the choice of his
successor.

Divination; Premonition; Dreams

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Divination. It plays an essential role among the Refugee Blacks
as in all animistic societies. Individuals have recourse to it
to inspire all important discussions; in large measure one can
say that for them it takes the place of will and conscience.

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But divination is more than that; the interpretation it gives of the events of daily life is the very mover of the animistic society; presenting calamities /236/ as the punishment of offenses against customary law, it is constantly vitalizing that law, conserving its practical value and its efficacy. What it expresses is not the hidden influence of chiefs or priests -- there are in fact neither chiefs nor priests among the Boni -- but the very consensus of the group, the deep feeling it has of its unity.

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There are two large categories of divination:

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The first consists of calling on a divinity through the medium of its bearer. For that, one applies to a person (of his lineage if possible) who has a gadu. This is a service which is rarely refused. This person employs the appropriate procedure for calling his gita and enters into trances. The god speaks, the question is put to it; if it is well disposed, it may give the explanation or the advice requested. For example, one asks for advice before looking for another sector to make his clearings.

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Suggestible as the Boni may be, they do not fail to perceive that all the gods interrogated do not give the same directions. So they think that certain ones are stronger than others; there are people whose gita is considered to be particularly good, others whom they have stopped consulting entirely. The defunct head of Kotika village, Bayo, used to have a gita so remarkable that people would come from very far to consult it.

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The general opinion is, furthermore, that nowadays everything is degenerating and that good gita are no longer seen as in the olden days.

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These consultations involve only a very modest remuneration, a bottle of tafia at most (1). If it is not a matter of a

1. The remuneration of the possessed person is in question; the god always demands a payment for itself, of variable size according to its whim.